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From Left: Lady Gaga sings national anthem; singer-actor Jennifer Lopez delivers a power-packed performance; and Katy Perry sings 'Fireworks' during Biden's inauguration ceremony | AP

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Biden signs 17 orders

Hours after his inauguration, US President Joe Biden signed 17 executive orders, reversing some of the key foreign policies and national security decisions of Donald Trump

TACKLING PANDEMIC

Jeffrey D Zients appointed as the official Covid-19 response coordinator who will report directly to the President

US' ties with WHO restored. Dr Anthony S Fauci will head US delegation to WHO's executive board

The new president restored the National Security Council Directorate for Global Health Security and Biodefense, which Trump had disbanded

Biden also launched a '100-day masking challenge'

IMMIGRATION

Issued directions to fortify Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals programme, which provides temporary relief from deportation to undocumented immigrants who were brought to the US as children

The order also calls on Congress to enact legislation providing permanent status and a path to citizenship for these immigrants

Ended the so-called Muslim ban, which blocked travel from several predominantly Muslim and African countries to the US

Construction of border wall with Mexico halted. Legality of diverting federal money to fund the wall will be reviewed

CLIMATE CHANGE

Shot off a letter to the UN that will pave the way for the US to re-enter the Paris climate accord, which it will officially rejoin 30 days from now

In 2019, Trump had notified the UN that the US would withdraw from the coalition of nearly 200 countries

ENDING RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Revoked Trump administration's 1776 Commission, which recently released a report allegedly distorting the role of slavery in the US

Directed federal agencies to report on equity in their ranks within 200 days, including how to remove barriers to opportunities in policies

Ordered agencies to ensure Americans of all backgrounds have equal access to federal government resources, benefits and services | P12

I'm not joking when I say this: If you ever work with me and I hear you treat another colleague with disrespect, talk down to someone, I will fire you on the spot. No ifs, ands or buts — President Biden's warning to his political appointees

50,000

SENSEX ON A HIGH

World stocks racked up record highs on Thursday on the back of expectations of a major US stimulus. The Sensex also traded high during the initial hours, breaching 50,000 for the first time. It, however, closed 167 points lower at 49,624.76 | P13

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THE 'NAYS' HAVE IT, GOVT OFFER REJECTED

Small farmer unions in favour, big ones against proposal

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi/Chandigarh

THE government's hopes of ending the deadlock over the farm laws before Republic Day were dashed on Thursday with the farmers' unions rejecting the proposal to suspend the laws for two years or more and forming a joint panel to examine the entire gamut of issues.

In a statement issued after two rounds of meetings, the first among the 32 Punjab unions followed by all the organisations under the Samyukt Kisan Morcha banner, the farmers said "the proposal put forth by the government yesterday was rejected."

"A full repeal of (the) three central farm laws and enacting a legislation for remunerative MSP for all farmers were reiterated as the pending demands of the movement," the morcha said.

But sources said the decision was not unanimous, with some smaller unions, who were in a minority, in favour of accepting the Centre's proposal but with several conditions, while the bigger ones, mainly from Punjab, firm on continuing with the agitation.

The sources said the majority view to reject the proposal was mainly two-fold. First, the protest was peaking and if they withdrew at this point, they may not be able to build up another movement in the future for a repeal of the laws in case the proposed committee rejects this demand. Second, 143 farmers had died during the agitation and if they were to accept the offer without getting the laws repealed, their sacrifice would have gone in vain.

The split in opinion led to some heated exchanges during the meeting, the sources said, forcing a vote over the issue. "The consensus was that we should stick to our stand of repeal. Voting took place in the meeting of all the 40 unions in which most voted for rejecting the proposal," a leader said.

Joginder Singh Ugrahan, the leader of the largest union, said "we want the Centre to enact a legislation for remunerative MSP and also a law with the provision that the government procures these crops at MSP as it has been doing to date."

"The Punjab unions decided to reject the Centre's proposal. They informed this at the joint meeting. There was a feeling that 143 farmers have sacrificed their lives and there is no point in settling for anything less than a repeal," said All India Kisan Sabha general secretary Hannan Mollah

The morcha paid homage to the farmers who have died in the movement so far. P9

TRACTOR RALLY TALKS

Meeting between farmer union leaders and the Delhi Police on tractor parade on Republic Day inconclusive

Farmers firm on holding the rally on the Outer Ring Road in Delhi, while police wary of disturbing law and order, want them to call it off

Thousands of tractors for the rally from Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan already parked on Delhi's borders

State farmers to hold tractor rally

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Mysuru/Shivamogga/Chikkamagaluru

REJECTING the Centre's proposal to put the farm laws on hold for two years, Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha leader Kodihalli Chandrashekhar said they will go ahead with the tractor rally in Bengaluru on Republic Day in solidarity with their counterparts in Delhi.

Instead of heeding to farmers' demands, the Centre is pushing half-hearted solutions. Similarly, the State Government is also pushing farmers into a corner by adopting the laws, along with the prohibition on cow slaughter, he noted. P7

UMESH KATTI
Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs

S ANGARA
Fisheries Department, Ports and Inland Transport Department

ARAVIND LIMBAVALI
Forest

MURUGESH NIRANI
Mines and Geology

MTB NAGARAJ
Excise Department

CP YOGESHWAR
Minor Irrigation

R SHANKAR
Municipal Administration and Sericulture

WHAT CM RETAINS

Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms, Cabinet Affairs, Finance Department, Bengaluru Development, Energy, Intelligence from Home Department, Planning - Programme Monitoring Statistics Department, Infrastructure Development

Swalpa adjust maadi? BSY's cabinet seethes with discontent

ASHWINI M SRIPAD @ Bengaluru

BOLSTERED by the central party command's renewed espousal of faith in him, Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa is seeking to calm the waters of dissent by recrafting the shape of his cabinet. But playing captain is never easy when the seas are rough. The portfolios he allocated today to his seven new ministers has itself become a fresh point of contention.

Last week's long-awaited cabinet expansion had already created heartburn among those left out. Now, as many ministers express displeasure over not getting what they wanted, Operation Salvage is turning truly messy.

For one, the CM continues to keep key portfolios such as Finance, Bengaluru Development and Energy with him – that reduces the pool from which he can draw. As a consequence, those who had to make space for the seven legislators who took oath as ministers on January 13 are openly airing their discontent, in action if not words.

Minister Gopalaiah has been given the Horticulture portfolio while new inductee Umesh Katti gets Food and Civil Supplies that was with the former. While Home Minister Basavaraj Bommai gets additional responsibility of Law and Parliamentary Affairs, J C Madhuswamy has been moved Medical Education, Kannada and Culture portfolio. Aravind Limbavali, who was eyeing Bengaluru Development, gets Forest ministry, while M T B Nagaraj will be the new Excise Minister.

R Shankar has been given Municipal Administration and Sericulture while Fisheries, Ports and Inland Transport, which was with Kota Srinivas Poojari, has been given to S Angara, the new minister. C C Patil gets Small Scale Industries, Information and Public Relations.

CONTINUED ON: P4

Five dead in blaze at Serum Institute facility

SUDHIR SURYAWANSHI @ Mumbai

FIVE persons were charred to death after a fire broke out at Serum Institute of India's plant at Manjri in Pune on Thursday afternoon. The blaze occurred at an under-construction building and all the dead were contractual workers doing electrical works in the building.

The deceased were Pune residents Mahendra Ingle and Pratik Pashte, Rama Shankar Harijan and Bipin Saroj from UP, and Bihar native Sushil Kumar Pandey.

Nine people were evacuated from the spot. According to a labourer who was working in the building at the time of incident, the mishap happened due to sparks from welding works on the sixth floor. However, officials said the cause is yet to be ascertained.

"We will carry out further investigation and ascertain the cause of the fire," said Pune Fire Brigade chief Prashant Ranpise.

The Manjari facility is where the Covishield vaccines are made. However, the building where fire broke out is around 1 km away from the Covishield vaccine manufacturing unit. Serum Institute CEO Adar Poonawalla said Covishield vaccine production will not be hit due to the fire incident.

Workers wearing protective gear walk after a fire broke out at Serum Institute's plant at Manjri near Pune on Thursday | PTI

According to eyewitnesses, there were over 200 workers in the building. After the fire broke out, they tried to rush out. But the fire and smoke spread so fast that their path was blocked, forcing many to jump out of the windows.

Clarifying that the fire broke out in the BCG vaccine section, Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray said, "The fire occurred due to an electric fault during the on-going construction works. Probe will reveal all details."

Serum has announced ₹25 lakh compensation to families of persons who died in the fire.

MORE: P10

SC grants bail to actor Ragini in drugs case

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

KANNADA actor Ragini Dwivedi, who was arrested in connection with the Sandalwood drugs case, was granted bail by the Supreme Court on Thursday.

Ragini was arrested by the Bengaluru Central Crime Branch (CCB) on September 4 last year, when she appeared before the investigating officer for inquiry in the case. She was held in connection with an FIR registered at Cottonpet police station under provisions of the NDPS Act, and was remanded in judicial custody on September 14. She was named Accused No. 2 in the FIR.

Her bail petitions were rejected by the Special Court for NDPS cases on September 28, and by the Karnataka High Court on November 3. Later, her advocates moved the Supreme Court seeking bail. On Thursday, a bench of Justices R F Nariman, Navin Sinha and K M Joseph granted bail to the actor.

Sources said that Ragini, who has been lodged in the Bengaluru Central Prison for more than 130 days, will be released once her advocates get a copy of the court order and fulfil the bail conditions. It is learnt that she may be released on Friday. P5

Less exam stress for students this year

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

IN a move aimed at reducing stress among students in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic, the State Education Department has come out with several guidelines on conducting the final examination for students of Classes 1 to 9 and also for SSLC students.

For students of Classes 1 to 5, schools have been permitted to take a decision on promoting them based on only one Formative and one Summative Assessments instead of two and one, respectively.

The guidelines, issued by Commissioner, Department of Education, on Thursday stated that considering the pandemic situation, and also the fact that lessons taught till now have been mostly online, on DD Chandana and through Vidyagama, schools will be conducting only one FA and one SA examination for Classes 1 to 5.

For Classes 6 to 9, the department has come up with an Alternative Academic Calendar. Considering the fact that the schools have not been able to conduct regular classes and the students, even under the Vidyagama programme, have been coming to schools only alternate days, the teachers can identify lessons which have continuity (spiral) for the next academic year.

"It is good if the schools are given an option to decide on the ability of the child and also the spiral curriculum. Then it won't burden the child or the teacher," said D Shashikumar of Karnataka Associated Managements of English Medium Schools (KAMS). P2

Sasikala tests +ve for Covid, Chennai return to be delayed

Sasikala being taken to Victoria Hospital on Thursday | EXPRESS

BALA CHAUHAN @ Bengaluru

V K Sasikala, the jailed close associate of former Tamil Nadu chief minister J Jayalalithaa, has tested positive for Covid-19. She has been shifted to the ICU in the trauma care centre (TCC) at Victoria Hospital, which is exclusively for Covid-19 patients. "She is being given oxygen and is not on ventilator support. We are closely monitoring her," said Director-cum-Dean of Bangalore Medical College and Research Institute (BMCRI), Dr C R Jayanthi.

Sasikala, who was keen to return to Chennai upon her release from prison on January 27, will now have to stay put in Bengaluru until her complete recovery. Her Covid test result has thrown the authorities at the Bengaluru Central Prison in a tizzy. "We don't know how she contracted the virus. She is sharing a room with co accused and sister-in-law Ilavarasi in the prison, which is in a high-security block," said sources in the Prisons Department. P7

CT SCAN CONFIRMS INFECTION

Sasikala's RT-PCR test, which was conducted at Bowring Hospital on Wednesday, had come negative. In less than 24 hours, the same test was repeated on her at Victoria Hospital, which returned Covid-positive. According to sources, the RT-PCR test can sometimes come as false negative or false positive. "Her CT scan of chest clearly showed severe infection of lungs. It strongly indicated that she had contracted Covid-19," said sources.

EXPRESS READ

Six dead as gelatin sticks explode in Shivamogga

Shivamogga: Six labourers, working at a stone crushing unit near Hunasodu village in the district, were killed on Thursday when gelatin sticks being transported in a lorry exploded. Sources said that the explosion was so intense that it caused a loud bang. Meanwhile, rescue efforts were stalled due to the dust and stench. P5

India within striking distance of growth: RBI

Mumbai: India's GDP is within the striking distance of attaining positive growth, the RBI said observing that the letter "V" in the V-shaped recovery stands for vaccine. P13

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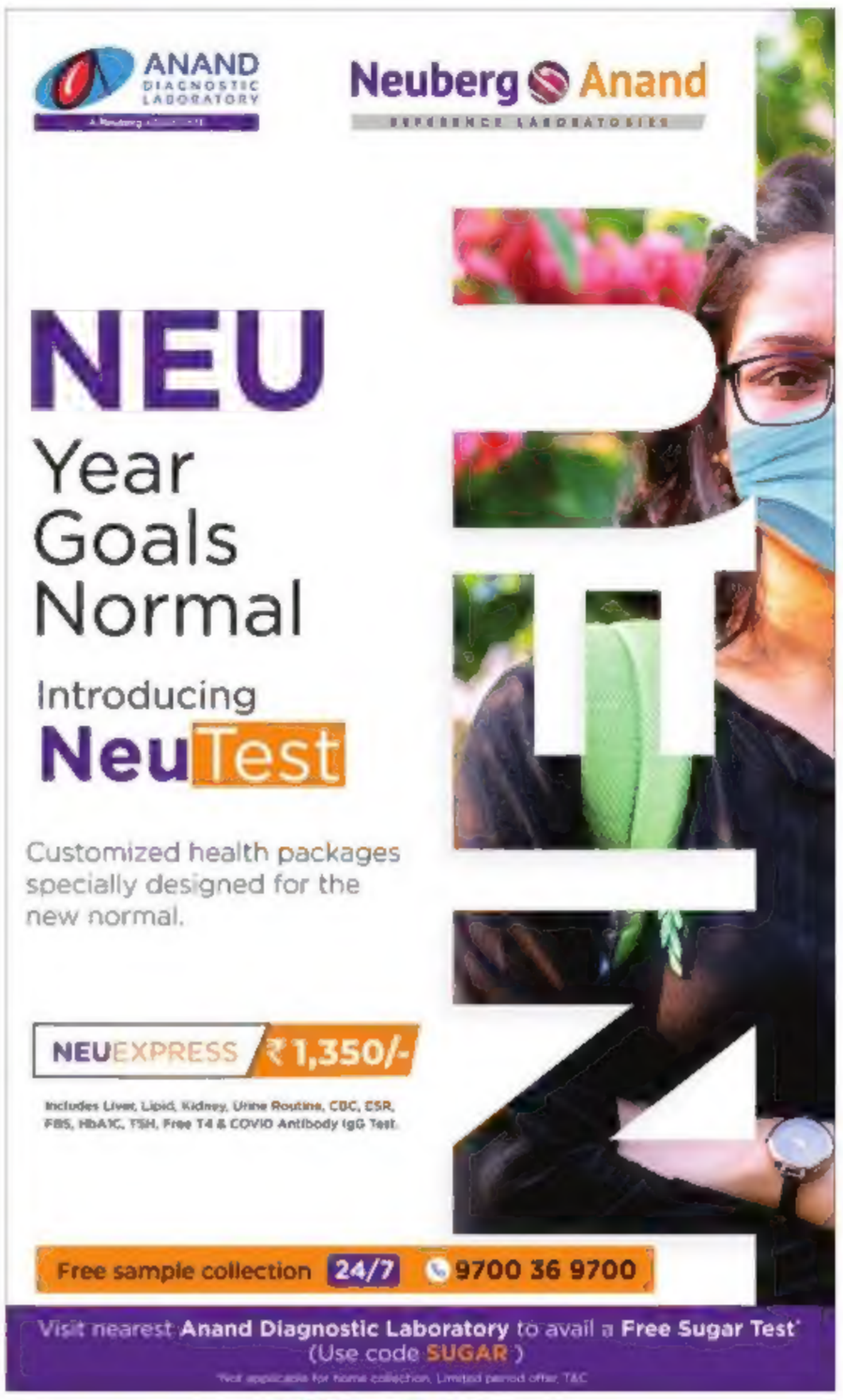
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